

Pastor Jon's Sermon for Sunday, February 28, 2021

Text: Genesis 17 and Romans 4:13-25

During this season of Lent, we will learn about different covenants God made with God's people. Last week we heard about Noah and the flood and God's promise to never flood the whole earth signified by the rainbow. Today, even though we didn't read it in church, the covenant is with Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 17. God promised a 75 year old Abram he would have son with Sarai and become the father of many nations. And oh by the way, he had to relocate. It's tough to move any time... but at 75??? Covenants are promises from one party to another that are built on trust. Sometimes they come with conditions, and other times there are no conditions. Oftentimes there is a sign of the covenant.

I made a covenant with Jeranna on our wedding day almost 24 years ago... "to have and to hold from this day forward, in joy and in sorrow, in plenty and in want, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until death parts us." The sign of our covenant was our wedding rings. Let me ask you, is our covenant conditional or unconditional? As much as I want to say our vows and love for each other are unconditional... I have learned over time... that if I meet her conditions, all goes well for me. Ha! Ha!

In the Abraham and Sarah story, God promises land and offspring to a couple who are well up into their golden years. This covenant is established by God as an everlasting covenant. It, however, demanded a response from Abram. This is where faith comes in. Faith can also be translated as trust or belief. Abram needed to step out in faith. Abram did follow through on his end of the bargain and believed God's promises... as impossible as they seemed. Abram got up and moved his family 500 miles to the land God promised him. Abram's name changed to Abraham, which means "multitude", and Sarai's name changed to Sarah, which means "princess".

Abraham laughed at God's proposal, and Sarah laughed too in the next chapter, basically saying, "Can a 100 year old man and 90 year old woman have children? God fulfilled God's promise 24 years later. They eventually had a son together, Isaac, whose name means "to laugh." God followed through on God's promise. Abraham

believed God's promise. I can't imagine waiting 24 years for anything! One year of this pandemic seems like a lifetime.

Abraham was a pretty good man, but he wasn't perfect. When he and Sarah went to a foreign region, Abraham passed off Sarah as his sister to King Abimelech, for survival purposes. In other words, he lied. Even though it turned out to Abraham's advantage, Abraham lied to the king.

God continues to be gracious even though we humans continue to fall short of God's glory. We don't follow God's commands as we should and trust in God's promises for us. We deny God as the center of our life and place trust in ourselves or created things. I feel right at home that God calls people who are deeply flawed to carry out God's purposes on earth.

In our second lesson for today from Romans 4, the apostle Paul, a former persecutor and murderer of Christians, reminds us that there is a new sheriff in town. It is called faith. He argues that the law of faith preceded the law of Moses. He saw how Abraham stepped out in faith in the Old Testament before the covenant of the law with Moses was established.

Paul says, Abraham's faith was reckoned to him as righteousness. In other words, Abraham was put in a right relationship with God through his obedience and trust... through faith... before the 10 commandments were established. Simply put, just believing in God's promises justify us (right relationship) in God's sight.

Therefore, Paul argues that Gentiles, like you and me, are grafted into the covenant of Abraham because it was built on faith and not the works of the law or on lineage.

Paul says "Yes" the law is still good and useful, but it doesn't save us. It keeps order and convicts us of our sins... which drive us to the foot of the cross. There Jesus meets us and forgives us.

In Lent, as we head toward Good Friday and Easter, we are reminded of another covenant. It involves a cross. Remember when Jesus says at the last supper when he took the cup, gave thanks, and said, "this is

the new covenant in my blood shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.”

God made a new covenant with us in Jesus Christ. This covenant is unconditional. God didn't wait for us to get it right before sending Jesus into the world. Jesus came while we were still sinners. Do you believe this?

The promises attached to this covenant are forgiveness, eternal life, and peace.

Remember, in the Bible, when God makes a promise, God keeps it. We don't have to be perfect to receive God's promise. God offers it to us in Jesus Christ... who came to earth to be like us.

Where is God calling you this Lent? How is God asking you to make a leap of faith, or a small step of faith? What is holding you back? Explore these questions this week.

Amen